



Greetings

I'd like to share a surprising lesson I've learned over the last 2 years at BOKF. That lesson is that small and slow improvement can be "agile."

I'd like to show you how tortoise-like movements, combined with commitment and determination over time can yield surprising agility.

The Fable

- ◆ Hare was making fun of tortoise, "Do you ever get anywhere?"
- ◆ "Let's race and I'll prove it!"
- ◆ The hare was amused and agreed.
- ◆ The hare outpaced the tortoise quickly and stopped to nap
- ◆ Slowly and steadily, the tortoise passed the hare.
- ◆ The hare woke too late to catch the tortoise.
- ◆ The tortoise won!

There's an old story that many of you have heard before.

A Hare was making fun of the Tortoise one day for being so slow.

"Do you ever get anywhere?" he asked with a mocking laugh.

"Yes," replied the Tortoise, "and I get there sooner than you think. I'll run you a race and prove it."

The Hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the Tortoise, but for the fun of the thing he agreed. So the Fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off.

The Hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the Tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try a race with a Hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the Tortoise should catch up.

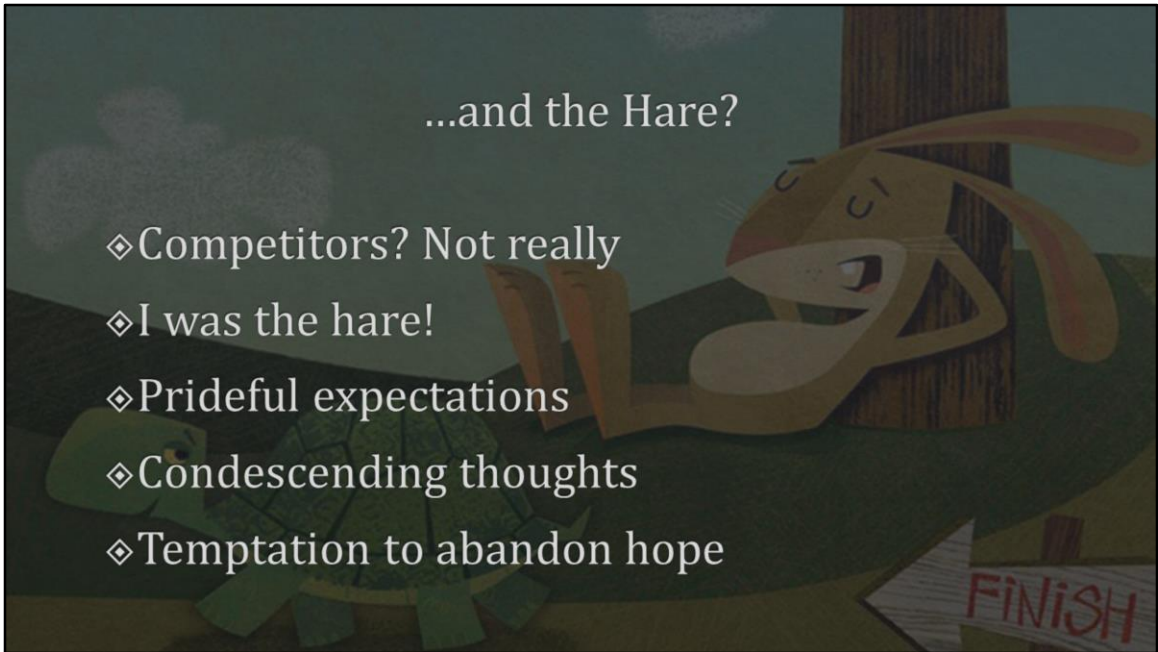
The Tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the Hare was sleeping. But the Hare slept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the Tortoise was near the goal. The Hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the Tortoise in time.

The BOKF Tortoise...

- ◆ Clunky, slow processes
- ◆ Fledgling understanding of agility and Scrum
- ◆ No shippable product each Sprint
- ◆ No cross-functionality
- ◆ No Definition of "Done"
- ◆ Manual regression
- ◆ Vendor Software
- ◆ Manual deployments

BOKF as the tortoise

- clunky, slow processes.
- Enthusiastic yet fledgling understanding of Scrum and agility
- Scrum wasn't producing potentially shippable product
 - 2 teams, neither was cross-functional
 - no definition of "Done" to speak of
- long, costly manual regression. No automated tests or skill in writing automated tests
- The software we were developing was from a vendor; limited control of the source code
- deployment to DEV and QA process was manual: 3 "slots" for manual deployments each day. Had to manually copy changed files, including instructions. Error prone, frustrating, costly in terms of time



...and the Hare?

- ◆ Competitors? Not really
- ◆ I was the hare!
- ◆ Prideful expectations
- ◆ Condescending thoughts
- ◆ Temptation to abandon hope

Competitors as the hare? Not really.

- Most were just as bad as us or worse
- I realized that I was the hare!
- My expectations of “agility”
- Honestly, I looked down on our technology, practices, etc for a time.
 - Temptation was to abandon hope and be self-righteous

Reality defies simple explanation. It's easy to think of agility as a hare. Words like quick, nimble, energetic, explosive, etc, etc.

It's easy to think of BOKF like a tortoise. Big, slow, heavy, 0-60 maybe.

Yet fable you heard presents a paradoxical truth: that focus and determination can produce remarkable results.



Think for a moment, what is your favorite game to play?

- One I'm invited to play and not made to play
- One I want to play
- One I can win

The game or race we started had a few important things about it:

- The need for improvement was obvious and accepted by everyone. They wanted to improve...badly
- They wanted me to play it with them and trusted me...a lot
- Humor is very important, perhaps the 6th scrum value?

The Agility of the Tortoise



Common conception: agility only equates with speedy revolution. Big improvements are exciting, revolutionary, and make for great presentations. How long can you maintain that dramatic change?

Big changes bring wow and sizzle for short periods. They are dramatic, chaotic, exciting, tiring, troublesome, draining, and unsustainable IMHO. After a time of status quo, a new revolution may come around after a good long while.

Small changes on the other hand:

- can be more orderly,
- a bit boring,
- less troublesome,
- energizing and
- much more sustainable.

Are small changes agile? I would say so.

The Agility of the Sustainable Tortoise



Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.



>Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.

- Organizations need to balance the risk of their activities.
 - Big risks can lead to big failures. The bigger the bet, the fewer you're inclined to take and the more unbalanced your approach. Eggs in one basket, and all that.
 - Small risks lead to small failures.
 - More palatable as learning experiences.
 - Smaller bets means more bets.
 - More baskets, fewer broken eggs.
- Sustainable tortoise says choose the right problems to fix next; don't boil the ocean.

Still agile.

The Agility of the Technically Excellent Tortoise



Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.



>Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.

Continuous, not just during times of rapid or revolutionary improvement.

- Not all technical improvements are small, but many are.
 - Small improvements like introducing your first unit tests or writing your first user story
 - Uncle Bob's "Boy Scout Rule"
 - Deciding to trust the team to facilitate their own Daily Scrum
 - Learning for 30 minutes each week adds up over time.

There's plenty of small things to improve all around you.

Still agile.

The Agility of the Simple Tortoise



Simplicity--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.



>Simplicity--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.

Big change quickly risks all kinds of mistakes.

- Buy-in,
- oversights,
- unintended consequences, etc.

Recovering from and reworking problems inherent in big-bang change is wasteful.

- All that time spent reworking,
- rearchitecting, and
- even rehiring

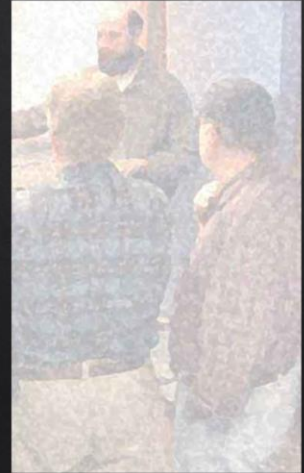
Think of all the time and energy you could be spending on valuable work. If you have the time to spare, make the small, step by step improvements you need towards achieving the big goal over time.

Still agile.

The Agility of the Reflective Tortoise



At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.



>At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Small improvements occasionally are not sufficient to solve big, pervasive problems. Revolutionary change occasionally might (remember the risk). Small improvements continuously can solve big, pervasive problems.

Still agile.

Tradeoffs in Organizational Change



The tortoise's pace is slow and steady. Keyword steady.

Org change can easily falter if the wrong trade-offs are taken.

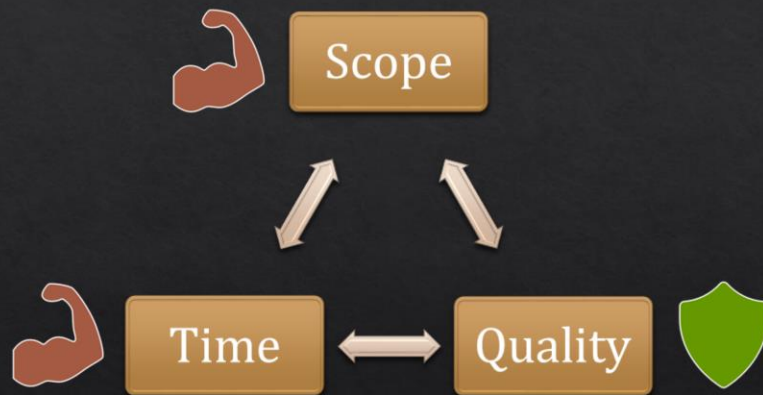
- When can we safely improve quickly vs proceed slowly and carefully?
- When should we change big, risky things vs small, safer things?
- When should we proceed without consensus vs wait to build it?

I'm here to argue for why smaller, steady improvements with consensus can still win you the race.

- small improvements over time establish trust and track record. Hard to argue with consistent success.
- Trust makes everything faster and cheaper.
- The next change becomes easier because of the solid foundation added to by previous, incremental changes.
- Creates opportunities for bigger, faster change

I'll focus for a minute on how a form of consensus, commitment, plays a key role in producing a steady pace of improvement for a team/organization

The Project Management Iron Triangle



The Scrum practitioner community is fond of using three terms to describe the tradeoffs made in a software development project. They are:

- Scope
- Quality
- Time

Flex on Scope and Time, but not on quality.

What if your craft is not software development but organizational change via continuous improvement?

The Organizational Change Triangle



Breadth

This is the scope of the organizational change. I would define it as a function of number of people affected, how each affected person's work must change, and how the affected person's mindset must be changed.

Urgency

This is the time constraint of the organizational change. We need to get Agile by the end of the year. We need to re-organize all our teams to be co-located this quarter. Effective immediately, everyone needs to use the new TPS report cover sheets.

Commitment

This the quality of the organizational change. People resist being coerced to change as a natural instinct. An organizational change that is forced may garner compliance but it will rarely accomplish commitment. Commitment implies workers agree and would do it even if they were not required.

Insisting on high quality:

- guards broken software and technical debt
- craftsmanship ensures workers are encouraged to expand their personal mastery of necessary skills and aptitudes.
- workers receive the pride of their workmanship.

Insisting on high commitment:

- guards an organization from the false change, dishonesty and the division organizational debt inevitably brings.
- requiring genuine leadership ensures leaders expand their personal mastery of necessary skills and aptitudes.
- these managers receive the pride of their workmanship.

The next time a leader forces others to just, “Do what they say” consider it the equivalent of an irresponsible, untested hack made in production that will probably cause more defects than it fixes.

Compliance vs Commitment



Compliance

Acting in accordance with a wish or command.



Commitment

The state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.

The Killing of Continuous Improvement

No Vision

No Leadership or Bad Leadership

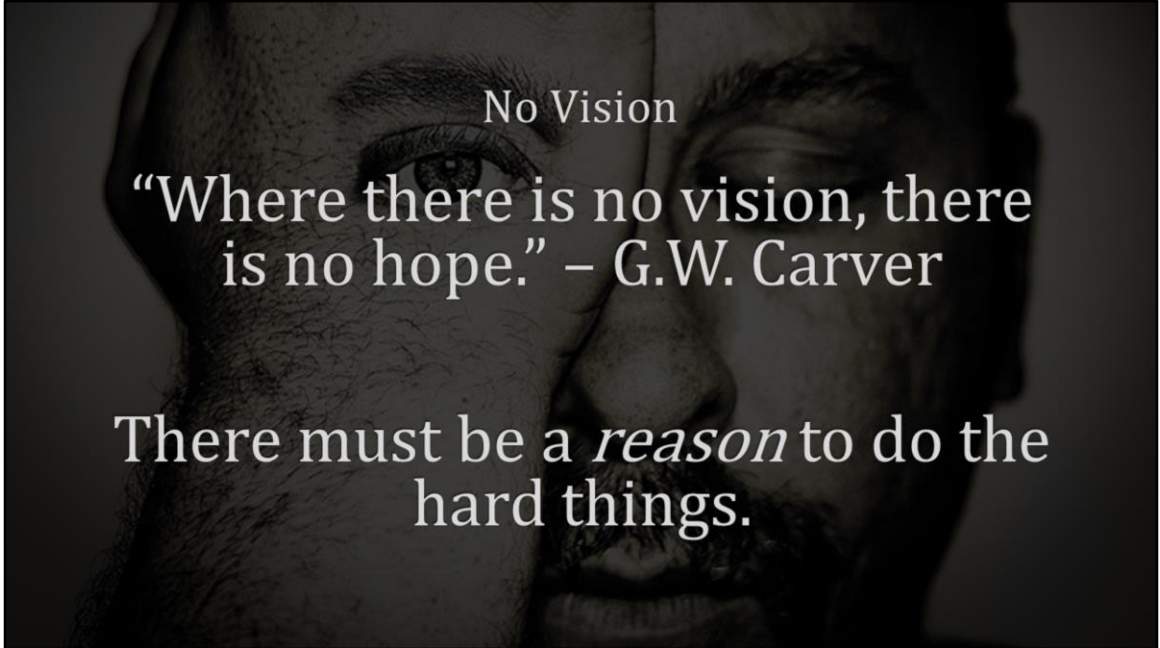
No Commitment

Many of you know what I'm proposing is easier said than done.

I'll talk about 3 things that will stop your tortoise dead in its tracks and could kill continuous improvement.



If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
Inattention to results.
Can lead to complacency.
Lack of courage.



No Vision

“Where there is no vision, there
is no hope.” – G.W. Carver

There must be a *reason* to do the
hard things.

There must be a reason to do the hard thing. Otherwise, why suffer? Why not take it easy, be apathetic and comfortable?

Some may realize that standing still can mean falling so far behind, a crash is inevitable. The fear of this is not a sustainable force to compel through sizable difficulty.

George Washington Carver is quoted as saying, “Where there is no vision, there is no hope.”



Forgetting that power is given

Power Is Only Given

Gun to your head example



Forgetting that power is given

Power Is Only Given

Gun to your head example



Forgetting that power is given
Bringing expertise to an expertise fight

Power Is Only Given

Being in charge means caring for those in your charge
The servant as leader vs the leader as servant

[The Servant as Leader] ([http://www.ediguys.net/Robert K Greenleaf The Servant as Leader.pdf](http://www.ediguys.net/Robert%20K%20Greenleaf%20The%20Servant%20as%20Leader.pdf))

[6 Forms of Power] (<https://controlyourchaos.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/scrum-masters-toolkit-french-ravens-5-6-forms-of-power/>)

[Psychological Models in Scrum] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyDYpGCuvaA&t=1322s>)
Gun to your head example.

1 Reward and 2 Coercive

These two forms are the most common in nature. Every animal is susceptible to those. Basically they mean that you can do something for someone in order to receive a reward or avoid punishment. This is exactly the carrot & stick. If you use this power, you will get obedience. But nothing more. So if you want your dog to obey, you can give him or her treats to reinforce good behavior and punish bad. But remember, even if you do that, you might not be able to take control over your dog. Because when you turn around, the sausage will still disappear. Exactly the same applies to humans. If you reward and punish, everything will go towards what you reward and what you punish will be hidden. But apart from that, no creativity can be expected.

3 Given / Formal / Legitimate

This power is only present in creatures who build societies. Did you ever watch The Dog Whisperer with Cesar Millan? If you did, try to remember what he wanted to achieve. He was the Pack Leader for the dog and taught owners how to do the same. He wanted the dog to be submissive. And this is exactly what you will have if you have formal power over someone - like a manager or a police officer. Someone who is high in social ranks, somehow culturally above someone else. But if you operate with this power, you will have submission and submission only. There is still very little creativity involved.

4 Expert

Expert power is something that can be described as being respected, because you know a lot or can do something. This is something that has not been observed in any creatures, besides human. Some researchers believe dolphins, elephants, apes and crows may exhibit that power as well, but no hard proof has been found yet. Working with someone with that power over you, gives you wings to learn. You want to become just like this example someone, so you listen, follow footsteps and try to master this subject. This power gives you learning and conquering difficulties.

5 Referent

This is a power that's closest to trust. In large quantities it's perceived as Charisma. It's something that produces good

feelings and engagement. It's a power that's easiest to lose and hardest to gain. You feel that this person is just right, you follow their lead. It's something good leaders have.

6* Informational

Why is there an asterisk here? Because this power was added later on, it wasn't in the original research. This is a power that is present only in informational societies. Where having, withholding or manipulating information is possible. Some also argue if this is not only a different manifestation of a rewarding or coercive power. I will leave it for your consideration.

Why do I care?

Because the higher the power number is, the harder it is to gain, but the bigger the benefits are. It's easy to coerce someone to do something, threatening them to sack them or promising a yearly bonus.

Also because coercive and rewarding powers are encoded in our reptilian brain, they are our instincts and it's extremely hard in a critical situation not to use them. Same applies to given power - only if you give in to your instincts, the more primitive one will take over - the carrot and the stick.

And in critical situations we need creativity, learning and engagement the most - to quickly get out of that crisis.

That's why Scrum Masters have to have Expert and Referent power but not formal, coercive or rewarding ones. So that they can get the most of people any time.s

Have you been led by someone who...

- ◊ Doesn't care to listen or understand you?
- ◊ Seems consumed with drive for power or material things?
- ◊ Doesn't say, "Come with me" but rather "Get going!" and "Do as I say!"
- ◊ Ignores the negative effects their leadership is clearly having on you, the world, and even themselves?

How many here have been lead by someone who:

- Doesn't care to listen or understand you?
- Seems consumed with powerful drive for power and material things?
- Doesn't say, "Come with me" but rather "Get going!" and "Do as I say!"
- Ignores the negative effects their leader is clearly having on you, the world, and even themselves?

This sort of leadership is all to common. It can work for short periods and with some people.

Ultimately, it is not sustainable and has the effect of stamping out commitment and creativity.

Speaking of commitment...

No Commitment

- ◇ Little quits...
- ◇ ...lead to big failures
- ◇ Faithful attention to small things...
- ◇ ...leads to success in the big things.

Even with a compelling vision, habitual patterns can torpedo the commitment of a culture along its journey

Little Quits

It's rare that one quits something big without first quitting many times on something small.

When the "bigness" of the thing I'm wanting seems too daunting, I'm tempted to quit little and fail big.

To reverse this, I must believe that faithful attention to the small things will lead to success in the big things. I must have this as a *hope*.

Lack of commitment to the little things can kill continuous improvement.

No
Commitment

“A bad system will beat a good person every time.” – W. Edwards Deming



The Incentives that Bind Us

Individual rewards that conflict with the team goals

Leaders modeling bad behavior

Short-term, finite thinking

A bad system beats a good man every day. – Deming

Paid for finding and fixing bugs.

Individual rewards that conflict with team collaboration.

Leaders who model “If it ain’t broke, don’t spend time improving it.”

Short-term, finite thinking.

The Sustaining of Continuous Improvement

Now that you've seen ways to kill continuous improvement...

...what can be done to nurture and sustain it?



Now that you've seen some ways to kill continuous improvement, here's how I've learned to encourage and sustain continuous improvement to keep that agile tortoise steadily stepping toward the finish line.

Servant Leadership

“The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?”

I asked you all before, who had experienced bad leadership.

How many here have been lead by a servant leader? Here's the test.

Being in charge means caring for those in your charge.

[The Servant as Leader]([http://www.ediguys.net/Robert K Greenleaf The Servant as Leader.pdf](http://www.ediguys.net/Robert_K_Greenleaf_The_Servant_as_Leader.pdf))



Gently wielding the power entrusted to us

- ◇ Check for alignment
- ◇ Be quick to understand
- ◇ Watch for ability and willingness
- ◇ Choose moments wisely
- ◇ Act with restraint
- ◇ Be ready to back off

Servant leaders wield the power given to them, but gently.

The picture of gentleness here is like one who has a sword and knows how to use it but keeps it sheathed.

Choose moments wisely and act with restraint.

Too many mistakes, I'll quickly lose trust and those who have given me power over them will take it back.

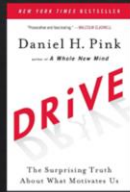
Careful to check for alignment and hesitance.

Quick to understand and empathize.

Watch carefully for the interplay between ability and willingness to know when to support and when to direct.

After directing, I'm on the hunt for the moment when I should back off.

"Drive"ing results



The desire for autonomy.

The Pursuit of mastery.

The desire to have purpose, connection, or belonging.

I'm a little annoyed with how one of our core values can be used. Driving results is important at BOKF. I'm sure you can imagine how this can be abused by the heavy-handed leader, the micromanager, or some other legitimate power to otherwise abuse those in their charge.

For me, this takes on a different form. I do my best to draw from Dan Pink's wisdom. In his book "Drive" he outlines 3 basic motivational forces common to human beings.

1. The desire for autonomy.
2. The Pursuit of mastery.
3. The desire to have purpose, connection, or belonging.

look for ways to encourage doing what they think is best and to expect the same of each teammate.

creating the opportunity, providing equipment, and encouragement to improve towards master.

Don't steal pride of workmanship.

Tend the garden, Fruits of focus, courage, commitment, openness, respect and humor.

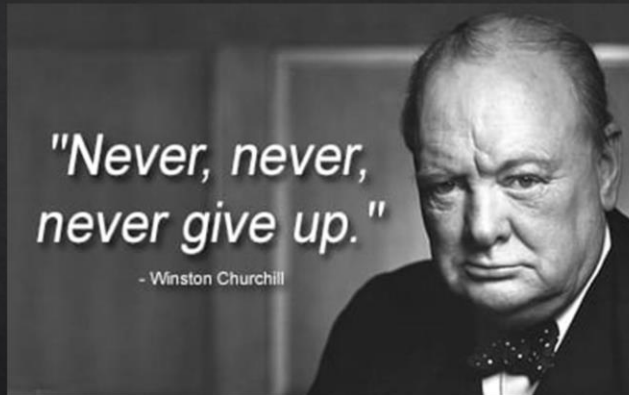
Uproot that which threatens this place of meaning, purpose and belonging.

This is how I “Drive” results.

Jealously guarding hope

◇ Guard against:

- ◇ Naysayers
- ◇ Excessive challenge
- ◇ Too little challenge
- ◇ Conflicting visions



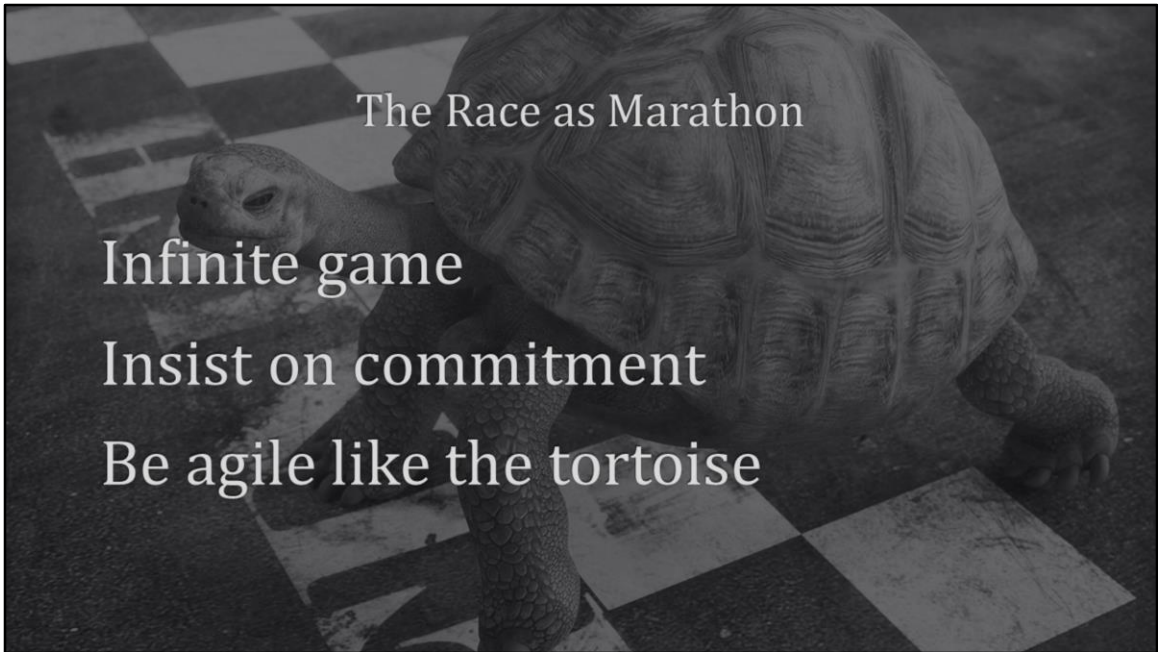
Hope is a cross-cutting concern, especially at beginnings.

Vision is distant.

Have you ever climbed a mountain? The peak can seem intolerably distant. Looking back can fortify hope. I've come this far, maybe I can keep going?!

Jealously guard hope against:

- Naysayers
- Excessive challenge
- Too little challenge
- Conflicting visions



Now we come to the end.

I'll share how all these things lead to the BOKF tortoise is winning its race.

Key to winning at this race has been correctly seeing the game we're playing as an infinite one.

We are not playing it to beat competitors

We stay sufficient near or ahead of them.

We play keep playing without compromising the rules we have chosen – the things we value.

We insist on commitment as an important marker of the quality and staying power of our improvements.

We do our best to work sustainably.

We insist on an ever improving standard of excellence.

We reflect regularly and often to avoiding waste and improve what we can.



For me personally, I do my best to respect the lives of those with whom I work. Serve as leader, gently wielding the power entrusted to me.

The life metaphor has even given me a motto I try to live by:

“My job is to honor the ideas, structures, and processes that are dying and serve as midwife to those being born.”

When processes, ideas and structures that have worked in the past are clearly no longer useful, I honor them and do my best to lessen the pain of their passing.

I do my best to joyfully welcome the new and guard it against that which might end it prematurely.



As for my Scrum team, the BOKF tortoise, we're playing the game we want to play.

We've come a long way from where we were in December 2019.

We have been continuously integrating and delivering our work since mid-last year.

We can deploy on demand.

We work with our Product Owner daily to ensure the work we deliver is of the highest value we can manage.

We use reflection, reframing, and impact feedback to respectfully and effectively communicate with each other.

We're winning

I'll end with a joke. When my grandma was 55, she started walking 2 miles a day. She's 90 now, and we have no idea where she is!

In two more years time, there's no telling where we'll end up. However, I'm confident that we'll still be playing the game we want to play and running our race like a tortoise.



Credits and More Learning